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The Manchester Journal.

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This long established Hotel still continues
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THE STORY OF AN ITALIAN PRIEST.

From Once a Week.

Some fifteen years ago, when the

Art Schools of Florence were more

than commonly crowded, my sacred

duties attached me to the cathedral of

that city, and I therefore had excel-

lent opportunities of studying the

phases of a branch of art-life to which

I was a stranger. I made many

friends; but among all who attached

themselves to me, though many were

more talented, few excited so much

interest on my part as a young man

named Giuseppe Vetrano, a native of

Sienna. He had lost both parents

during the ravages of an epidemic,

about five months before the time

when I first became acquainted with

him, and possibly this circumstance,

combined with his extreme youth—

he was but twenty years of age—first

invested him with an especial attrac-

tion. On further knowledge I found

him possessed of an amiable but

somewhat too retiring disposition, and

perceived that his education, though

not perfectly, had been honestly and

piously conducted. It needed no very

great diplomacy to draw his history

from him; the poor boy had but few

friends, and soon gave me his confi-

dence. He told me that he was the

only son of a struggling doctor of Si-

enna, and had been for some time

destined to follow the profession of his

father. His artistic instinct, how-

ever, weighed successfully in the scale

against the doctor's scruples, and

Giuseppe became a student at Flo-

rence. For two years Dr. Vetrano

contrived to send his son a certain al-

lowance—small, indeed, but still suf-

ficient to enable Giuseppe to devote

himself entirely to study. The lad

was industrious, and, though he de-

clined himself all the little indulgences

of youth, he still found leisure to write

hopeful letters home. Then came the

terrible calamity I spoke of—in a

week Giuseppe was an orphan. When

the bitterness of the fresh sorrow had

passed away, a second grief as formid-

able as the first succeeded. The doctor

and his wife had died in the direct

poverty—their entire possessions

barely sufficed to buy them the right

to a grave. Their son was penniless.

It was then that young Vetrano, find-

ing to his first great misery of the

heart, some sharper pangs—the pangs

of hunger. To displace the glorious

inspiration of his ideal from his pure

pedestal, and supply its place by the

image of a few coins, was wretchedness

enough; but to find even this last

poor goal unattainable was terrible.

He supported himself for some time

by the sale of his simple clothing; but,

though he aided to this poor re-

source by copying for the dealers, de-

stitution stared at him through the

canvas, and his brush was yet too

weak a weapon to defend him. That

his gentle nature could not long sus-

tain such trials I felt convinced. I

saw him but seldom, and after each

interval I found him sadder changed.

His visits to the church grew less

and less frequent, and at length, three

months passed by without my having

once encountered him there. I thought

of him with much anxiety, and though

I many times resolved to set my doubt

at rest, I almost trembled to learn

what I feared might be the truth.

"Then I will come."

"Truly?"

"I promise."

"How shall I find you?"

"I shall be here to-morrow at this

time—will that please you?"

"Beyond hope."

"Addio till then."

"I shall remember."

I could see them now. The March-

ioness drew her veil closely, and left

leisurely by the grand entrance—

Giuseppe remained motionless for

about ten minutes—then he followed

quickly.

I am almost ashamed to say that

on the next evening I waited for the

result of this appointment with more

anxiety than quite harmonized with

the nature of my education. A fat

Pistoia farmer was reciting a string

of market delinquencies, when two

figures that I instantly recognized

passed before the choir. Leaving my

penitent stationed at the severity of

the penance which I imposed on him,

I reached the porch in time to hear

the address that Vetrano gave to the

driver of a hackney coach. I remem-

ber it perfectly. It was no. 1236, V

a della Scala. The next day, meeting

the young painter alone on the same

spot, I presumed on the privilege of

my profession to make inquiries re-

specting the mysterious lady to whose

society I had twice observed him. To

my surprise—knowing the timidity of

his nature, and prepared as I was for

blushes and confusion—he became

deadly pale, and, darting a look of de-

fiance at me, hurried away without a

word.

Two months after this, I was one

day crossing the Piazza near the

Campanile, when I observed a boy

follow me for some distance, glanc-

ing every now and then doubtfully

into my face. At length he asked my

name, and on my telling him, said I

was indeed the holy father Signor

Vetrano had sent him in search of:

the Signor desired most urgently to

see me; would I come? Of course I

expressed my willingness to do, and

followed my guide to the V a della

Scala, No. 1236. The shutters of the

house were half closed, a restless

crowd filled the street, and the shop

was thronged. The landlord—a tal-

lor—rushed to me eagerly, and ex-

claimed:

"The rains be praised! the poor

young signor still asks for you."

I was strangely agitated.

"What is the matter?" I asked,

feebly.

"He is dying."

I inquired no more, but hurried up

the stairs, and, entering my poor

young friend's room, I found that the

landlord had but spoken too truly—

Giuseppe's hours were numbered.

He seemed to have aged at least

twenty years since I had last seen

him, and, though he tried to smile as

I opened the door, the effort was a

vain one indeed. The doctor stood at

the bed-side, and I addressed myself

to him in a whisper.

"What is it?" I asked.

"A bad sword-wound."

"Mortal?"

"I will not deceive you."

I sighed deeply. At the same mo-

ment Giuseppe opened his eyes, and,

beckoning the surgeon nearer to him,

cap, and, descending the four flights

of stairs, walked quickly towards the

Arco. As I stole along near the wall,

shrinking from the crowd as if it

mocked me, I felt my arm seized

roughly, and, turning angrily around,

found myself face to face with the

picture dealer for whom I had so fruit-

lessly searched during the day. He

dragged me into his shop, and, before

I had recovered from my surprise,

presented me to a stranger who was

seated near the door. This gentleman

rose politely, and, pointing to one of

my fly-stained and dusty pictures, said

that he understood that I was the ar-

tist—that its style pleased him; and

that, if I were willing, he could give

me a commission. I bowed my thanks,

and learned that the work required

was a picture of St. Catherine, for his

wife's oratory. He spoke much long-

er—naming the size and the price; but

I heard nothing, and, when I re-

covered from my profound astonish-

ment, I found that my patron had left

the shop, and that I held a rouleau of

seudi in my hand. I rushed home; but

the close garret stifled me, and I

went out again into the streets. I was

delirious with joy, and the masquer-

aders pushed me out of their way as if

I had been a man walking in a dream.

The throng swept me with it towards

the Piazza del Duomo, where I found

the steps of the cathedral as deserted

as the square itself was crowded. I

turned towards the silence, and stood

looking at the stars, and thinking that

I too had discovered a new world.

Dazzled as I was, I thought that to

see misfortune I must henceforth look

backward; but I deceived myself.

My first sorrow came into the world

with the birth of my first joy. I stood

upon the same spot for hours, looking

steadfastly before me, thinking of my